

# The Comprehensive Hearing Health Program for Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs partners with the Department of Defense Hearing Center of Excellence (HCE) to support the prevention of noise-induced hearing loss



(NIHL) in our Veterans through the promotion of its Comprehensive Hearing Health Program (CHHP). Many Veterans leave military service with some hearing loss. Preventing hearing loss from exposure to hazardous noise levels, or halting the progression of an existing hearing loss, is important for all Veterans even after their service in the military.

We know that:

- Exposure to dangerous noise levels can be hazardous to hearing, causing NIHL regardless of gender, age, or background.
- NIHL is an invisible injury that can impact our lives.
- NIHL can interfere with communication, degrade job performance, and diminish overall quality of life.

To address NIHL in our Veterans, the CHHP includes both health education regarding how to protect your critical sense of hearing, and periodic hearing monitoring. Your VA audiologist can provide guidance concerning how often your hearing should be tested.

## Hearing Loss Prevention Strategies

Protective measures that help prevent noise-induced hearing loss are included in the **EARS<sup>2</sup>U** hearing loss prevention strategy:

**EDUCATE** yourself about hazardous noise (85 decibels or greater).

**ADJUST** the volume of your personal listening devices.

**RECOGNIZE** and reduce noise hazards.

**SELECT** and properly use hearing protection devices.

**SEEK** annual hearing health services from an audiologist.

**UNDERSTAND** the consequences of unprotected exposure to noise, and that it can cause permanent inner ear damage.

Use these strategies to reduce the risk of NIHL. Maintaining or preserving the hearing you have will ensure that you can identify and react to sounds in your environment, as well as effectively communicate.

*It's a noisy world. Protect your hearing.*



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# HEARING LOSS PREVENTION

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## We Live in a Noisy World

We are commonly exposed to hazardous noise in both work and recreational environments. Whether we are hunting, attending sporting events and concerts, working with loud machinery, or even mowing the lawn, our activities can be very noisy.

Without the use of properly fitted hearing protection, noise becomes most hazardous to your hearing when it occurs at a level of 85 decibels (dB) for more than eight hours. Higher levels of noise become hazardous with much shorter exposure times. For example, your hearing can be damaged within 15 minutes if you are exposed to noise levels of 100 decibels or more. This can include activities such as riding motorcycles, mowing the lawn, target shooting, or hunting.



## Noise-Induced Hearing Loss

Noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) is invisible, painless, progressive, and permanent. NIHL is one of the most common population health issues facing our Veterans. It can occur gradually over time or it can result from a single exposure to loud noise.

Until it interferes with your ability to communicate, it's likely that you will not be aware of NIHL. Initially, you may notice communication difficulties in loud environments, such as trying to have a conversation in a noisy restaurant. Gradually, your attempts to communicate will become increasingly difficult in more and more situations. This can adversely affect your quality of life.

## Warning Signs and Symptoms

Warning signs of NIHL due to hazardous noise include:

- You hear buzzing or ringing in your ears, known as tinnitus.
- You have a feeling of fullness in your ears after leaving a noisy area, such as a concert venue.
- You can hear people talking, but have difficulty understanding what they are saying.



## Hearing is a Critical Sense

Imagine how difficult — and isolating — life could be without the critical sense of hearing. Crucial information obtained from sound is an important part of every aspect of our lives. Taking steps to prevent hearing loss — or address existing hearing loss — can go a long way in making social interactions a positive experience, as well as helping us to more safely maneuver throughout our daily lives.

### COMMUNICATION

Hearing is crucial to speech perception and understanding.

### SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Hearing allows you to judge your orientation to and distance from events happening around you. It allows you to localize new and unfamiliar sounds.

### JOB PERFORMANCE

When you are active in the workplace, you learn and receive critical information through verbal instructions, communicating with team members, and reporting. You may need to work with and listen to others in person and by phone, radio, and Internet voice conferencing.

### SAFETY

The ability to hear, identify, and localize critical sounds and conversations around you ensures your safety as you engage in your daily activities whether at work or at home.

### QUALITY OF LIFE

Your ability to hear enables you to fully appreciate and engage in family life, team sports, nature, and music.